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ABSTRACT

In 1823, evangelical missionaries William and Amanda Ferry opened a boarding school for Metis children on Mackinac Island, Michigan Territory, hoping to convert and transform the Metis people through their children. Instead, they helped bring about a revival of Catholicism, and their students refused to abandon the fur trading lifestyle. Chapter 1 relates the origin of the Metis through intermarriage when the French came to live and trade with the Chippewa in the Great Lakes area, and details the nature and characteristics of Metis' family life as an important part of the bicultural "middle ground" that bound together those in the fur trade. Chapter 2 describes how the evangelist desire to take the gospel to lost souls everywhere coincided with the expansionist attitude driving other Americans at the time. While the Ferrys' intentions were spiritual, they served as agents of acculturation. Chapter 3 follows the Metis' role as middle ground through French and English influences, and discusses the importance of their "folk Catholic" faith. Evangelical Protestant Christianity introduced a new, potentially explosive element into the Mackinac fur trading society. Chapter 4 describes the controversy between Catholics and Protestants at Mackinac as a conflict between two different world views. Catholicism responded by renewing its influence, and when the American leaders left, the Presbyterian Church ceased. Chapter 5 explores how common cultural concepts of the family unit allowed the mission's construct as a family in which Metis children and evangelical missionaries lived together. The missionaries unwittingly structured the school to ensure that their students would incorporate new ideas without rejecting their existing world view. The afterword tells of the closing of the mission and why the American Metis failed to develop a national identity, as happened in Canada. Appendices include a partial listing of students at the Mackinaw Mission, a list of missionaries to Mackinac and Lake Superior from 1822 to 1837, student letters containing conversion accounts, and an annotated sketch of the war between the Chippewa and Sioux. Contains extensive notes, 365 references, illustrations, maps, and an index. (TD)

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